

New destroyer has ties to Cuba

Story by MC1 Robert Lamb, Public Affairs

USS Gridley (DDG 101), the 51st Arleigh Burke class destroyer, and the fourth ship to bear the name 'Gridley,' will be commissioned at the Port of Miami on Feb. 10.

The act of placing a ship in commission marks her entry into active Navy service. At the moment when the commissioning pennant is broken and raised up the masthead, a ship becomes a Navy command in her own right, and takes her place alongside other active ships of the Fleet.

How does Guantanamo Bay link to the USS Gridley? As preparations for the commissioning were in full force, CDR Stephen Shinego, Commanding Officer of the Gridley, requested two U.S. flags be raised over Bulkeley Hall in honor of two gentlemen that have made an enormous impact on the commissioning ceremony of the Gridley - Raul Mas Canosa, and Mario Murgado.

Canosa, chairman of the Gridley Commissioning Committee, and Murgado, are Cuban immigrants who coordinated events, meetings and fundraisers with the city of Miami, Super Bowl committees and various other supporters of the Gridley commissioning.

"The flag that flies over Cuba and Gridley will have significant sentimental value as the link between their forbearers' homeland and their adopted homeland," said Shinego. "For Gridley, it's the extension of our appreciation for all they do to support all those that deploy around the globe to keep us safe. They are plankowners on Gridley, but before Gridley, and long after Gridley sails away, they



Photo by MC1 Robert Lamb

NCC(SW) Jon Monteleone prepares to raise a flag which will wave over Bulkeley Hall, and then be sent to the commissioning crew of the USS Gridley. The flag will then be flown on the Gridley, Feb. 10, as it is commissioned into active naval service.

will continue to care deeply for our servicemembers."

As soon as the Navy announces the location for such an event, local politicians, commerce and community individuals started raising money for this special occasion with Canosa and Murgado taking the lead.

"The command thought that giving them a United States flag that was flown in their honor and in their country would make it clear how much we appreciate all they have done," said NC1 Candice Abel, USS Gridley Command Career Counselor.

Canosa was born in Santiago, Cuba, not far from

Guantanamo Bay. His family fled the island in 1961 and he was raised from age 4 in the United States.

"I am now a proud American citizen of Cuban ancestry," he said.

Several years ago Canosa became very active in supporting military families and veterans. Along with a local county commissioner, he founded the "Salute to Our Heroes Fund" which has raised thousands of dollars to support established groups that support the military, such as the 'Armed Forces Relief Trust' and United States Marine Corps Scholarship Foundation'.

"In addition, we have supported our local veterans by funding job fairs, providing financial support, and providing other tangible assistance," Canosa said. "I also chair the Miami Committee of Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR), making sure that private businessmen understand the importance of our Guard and Reserve members.

Murgado's family also fled Cuba's oppressive regime many years ago. He is a very successful businessman, who owns a car dealership in Miami's "Little Havana" district.

"Mario is also proud of his adopted country and has been a strong supporter of the military for years. He has done an outstanding job as our fundraising chair," said Canosa.

This commissioning of the USS Gridley continues a tradition more than three centuries old, observed by navies around the world, and by the U.S. Navy since December 1775, when *Alfred*, the first ship of the Continental Navy, was commissioned at Philadelphia.

Once in commission, the commanding officer and crew are entrusted with the privilege, and the responsibility, of maintaining their ship's readiness in peace, and of conducting successful operations at sea in time of war.

"The flag flown over GTMO, and subsequently on GRIDLEY, will of course have very special meaning for me," said Canosa. "I hope to one day to return it to a free Cuba and my hometown of Santiago," said Canosa.